

“If It Were My Way, All This Ought to Be Red”:
George Thomas and the Frontier of the British Empire 1781-1802

A Senior Honors Project Presented to the Faculty of the
Department of History, University
of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For Bachelor of History with Honors

By Devon Hideo Miller

12/02/2017

Committee:

Dr. Marcus Daniel, Mentor

Dr. Peter H. Hoffenberg

Acknowledgements

To the teachers, coaches, and professors who have supported me over the course of my education. Everything I have learned in academe is the result of your endeavors and this is a debt I will never be able to repay.

To my friends and family who tolerated the library hermit I became over the course of this paper. I do not know where I would be without your support. You were the spark that lit my ambition which led me down this path, and the fuel which carried me through.

To my thesis committee members: Dr. Marcus Daniel and Dr. Peter H. Hoffenberg, thank you for your time, effort, patience, and expert advice, especially given the rather unconventional time-schedule of this project. Additionally, I would like to thank you for slogging through the veritable garbled tome that constituted the first draft. This is the result of your generous investment of time and effort.

I would especially like to thank my Mentor Dr. Marcus Daniel. Your support has been essential, and I cannot express how grateful I am for your suggestions.

Abstract

In 1805, a printer in England published a tale of imperialism, conquest and tragic loss from a memoir from Calcutta, India. Sponsored by key figures of the British Indian Administration, the *Military Memoirs of Mr. George Thomas* tells the story of a poor Irish Catholic boy who, in the midst of the war torn Maratha Empire, India in the 19th Century, carved out his own kingdom on the edge of the Punjabi. Succeeding in the chaotic maelstrom of violence, constantly shifting loyalties and political intrigue, his tale would be considered to be of ‘great interest’ to the British public by contemporaries. This project explores George Thomas’ story, analyzing who this man was, where he fits within his world, and why his story was told through the use of narratives, letters, and governmental debates.

While it is clear the author of the memoir wished to portray Thomas as a quintessential British patriot and soldier, it is equally clear that this portrayal of the man was not the reality. Adopting the pretensions of Nationalistic loyalty out of sheer pragmatism, Thomas was a proud, competent and ambitious man who, over the course of his life propagated three imperiums: Mahratta, British, and his own.

This project helps us to understand the political reality of the Maratha Empire during 1780-1802 and a 19th Century Catholic Irishman’s understanding of loyalty, honor, self-identity, and his place within his world, allowing us in turn to reflect upon ours.

Keywords: **Imperialism, India, Maratha Empire**

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In December of 1803, in the midst of the Second Anglo-Maratha War, a powerful faction of the Maratha Confederacy led by Vice Regent of the Mughal Empire Daulat Rao Sindiah surrendered to the army of the British East India Trading Company [EITC] under Lord Arthur Wellesley. The Maratha Confederacy -- a loose coalition of warlords who rose to power amidst the decay of the Muslim-run Mughal Empire -- presided over a collection of provinces in the North of India, where the British had been consolidating their power since the loss of the American Colonies in 1783. Following the defeat of the French-allied Tipu Sultan and the fall of Mysore in 1800, the Marathas were the only major obstacle to direct British control over India.¹ At the Battle of Delhi on the 11th of September, 1803, Britain's Governor General of the EITC, Lord Wellesley, had captured the Mogul Emperor, the nominal ruler of all India, and while remnants of the Maratha confederacy would continue to resist until 1805, the British became the dominant power on the continent.²

These victories, and the expansion of British power in India, generated great public interest in Britain about the inhabitants of their new acquisitions, and curiosity about the frontiers of an eighteenth-century British trading empire that was rapidly changing. In response to this interest, the London printer John Stockdale decided to reprint a work that he thought would have a topical interest: *The Memoirs of George Thomas* from the original edition published in Calcutta, in 1803. Stockdale, one of the most prominent printers in London at the time, expected the work to "excite a very general interest" and arranged to print it in octavio at "less than half the price of the quarto original" to ensure a wide readership³ The Britain, he believed, was

¹Kabir Kausar, *Secret Correspondence of Tipu Sultan* (New Delhi, Jammu: Light and Life Publishers, 1980) 167.

²William Francklin, *Military memoirs of Mr. George Thomas; who, by extraordinary talents and enterprise, rose from an obscure situation to the rank of a general, in the service of the native powers in the North-West of India* (London: Reprinted for John Stockdale, 1805) 2.

"The Times," *Greater London* 4 Jul, 1805: 2.

³Hannah Barker, *Stockdale, John (c. 1749-1814), Publisher and Bookseller* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

“materially interested in whatever is connected with its vast possession in India” and he thought this biography, “could not but be acceptable to this country.”⁴



Figure 1: Mr. George Thomas

Source: William Francklin, “Military Memoirs of Mr. George Thomas.” i. Print.

Certainly, the subject of the memoir was well timed. Its pages contained an account of the twenty year career of George Thomas, an Irish-born mercenary and military adventurer who “rising from his lowly station,” and without the benefit of high birth or a formal education, had fought his way to power and wealth amidst India’s Mahratta leaders, even carving out an

⁴Francklin, Military Memoirs 4.

independent kingdom for himself on the northern border of Maratha territory, before rejoining the British.⁵ At a time when the consolidation of British military and administrative forces in India was causing a lively public debate in England about colonial expansion, Thomas' memoir contained not only an account of his life, but was interspersed with detailed geographical, historical, anthropological and statistical accounts of the states, regions, and, peoples of north-western India, the very region where the British Empire now found itself in control.

The memoir was written by an established Oriental scholar and fellow soldier, Captain William Francklin, an employee of the EITC, a member of the Asiatic Society, and the author of several published books and articles on India.⁶ Francklin had met and interviewed Thomas as part of an EITC military escort that accompanied Thomas from Anupshahr to Calcutta in 1802, the port from which Thomas hoped to return to Ireland at the end of his career. Francklin had compiled the memoir from papers supplied to him by Thomas, and from his conversations with Thomas during their journey.⁷ He completed the memoir after Thomas died in India in 1802 from a fever acquired on their journey to Calcutta.

⁵Francklin, *Military Memoirs* 332.

⁶By the sources publication, Francklin was the author to: *A Tour to Persia (1790)*, *History of Shah Aulum (1798)*, and *Planes of Troy (1800)*.

See:

"The Times," 4 Jul, 1805: 2.

"The Times," *Greater London* 13 May, 1790 1.

"The Times," *Greater London* 14 April, 1800 2.

Asiatic Society: Established in 1784 the Asiatic Society was an orientalist scholar society dedicated to studying "whatever is performed by a man or produced by nature" within the geographical limits of Asia. -

<http://www.asiaticsocietykolkata.org/history>

⁷Henry George Keene, *Hindustan Under Free Lances, 1770-1820: Sketches of Military Adventure in Hindustan During The... Period Immediately Preceding British Occupation* (S.I.: Forgotten Books, 2016) 101.

"The Times," 4 Jul, 1805: 2.

It is assumed that Francklin kept Thomas' papers after death, but this nuance is not mentioned by anyone I have found. All that is known is that Francklin did have Thomas' papers following his death.

Thomas's memoir wasn't a bestseller, but it did enjoy some degree of commercial success, and it was published internationally, and reprinted multiple times.⁸ This public interest was partly due to its powerful sponsors, men with direct ties to the British Indian Administration and to the British Colonial Office and the EITC. These men included the Governor General and Captain General of India, Richard Wellesley (to whom Thomas had personally recounted his story on his final journey to Calcutta); the Honorable Sir John Anstruther, Lord Chief Justice of India; the Governor of Fort St. George and Bombay, Henry Russell; the Head of the Supreme Court of Judicature, John Royds; General Lake, the Commander in Chief, and two members of the Supreme Council.⁹ Why were these men so keen to sponsor the publication and distribution of the memoir of a military upstart like George Thomas? To answer this question, one must look at the context for the publication of the memoir, and at the life of the man himself.

Thomas was a complicated man in life, and in death he became a complicated historical character. His treatment by historians reflects this complexity. In *The Military Memoirs of George Thomas*, the primary contemporary account about Thomas first published in 1803, Francklin portrayed Thomas as a proud nationalist hero and a virtuous professional military man dedicated to his King and to the interests of the British Empire. Later treatments of Thomas have been less flattering, although Maurice Hennessy in *The Rajah from Tipperary* published in 1971 also views him fairly favorably as a romantic Catholic-Irish boy driven by innate concepts of heroism and virtue and inspired by exotic stories from his youth. On the other hand, Michael

⁸One such edition was published in 1808, and was cited in the July edition of the Edinburgh Review 1871 as part of a wider analysis of European Adventurers in India.

The Edinburgh Review, No. 274. Contents of July, 1871. Edinburgh: A. and C. Black, 1871: 361.

⁹Francklin, *Military Memoirs* 5.

Michael Edwardes, King of the World: The Life and Times of Shah Alam, Emperor of Hindustan (New York: Taplinger Pub. Co, 1971) 249.

Edwardes in *King of the World*, published in 1970 sees him as little more than a bandit. While Thomas does appear in more recent works, he and his memoir continue to be used for much the same purpose: exploring British perceptions of the inhabitants of North-West India and European explorers. One example of such usage is Linda Colley, in *Going Native, Telling Tales: Captivity, Collaborations and Empire*, published in 2000, in which she uses Thomas' narrative to explore British ideas about national identity and individuals who "went native." In this particular case, his appearance is rather brief, little more than a sentence, her coverage of him being rather unsubstantial.¹⁰ One thing that is agreed upon by all of these works however, is that Thomas appeared to have developed patriotic sentiments in the last chapters of his life. The second aim of this essay is to offer a suggestion as to why he suddenly developed such patriotic sentiments in the closing pages of his life. .

Very little is known about Thomas' early life in Ireland. He was born in Roscrea, in the County of Tipperary, the Catholic heartland of southern Ireland in 1756.¹¹ The son of a Roman Catholic farmer who died after a fall from his horse, Thomas did not get along with his stepfather, and left the small farm in search of a better life when his mother died in 1776.¹² He went to the port of Youghal in County Cork, where he worked loading grain on and off ships for about two years, and in 1778 sailed for Bristol and in 1780 joined, or more likely was impressed into, the British Navy.¹³

Accounts differ as to how Thomas fared during his time at sea. H. G. Keene, in *Hindustan Under Free Lances*, suggests Thomas was successful enough to be a quartermaster by

¹⁰ Linda Colley, "Going Native, Telling Tales: Captivity, Collaborations and Empire," *Past & Present* Aug. 2000: 182.

¹¹ Maurice Hennessy, *The Rajah from Tipperary* (London: New English Library, 1972) 6.

¹² Hennessy 7.

¹³ Hennessy 9.

the time he arrived in Madras, while others suggest he was a gunner.¹⁴ Regardless, Thomas deserted his ship in Madras in 1781, clearly deciding India offered him more opportunity than serving in the ranks of the British navy. Still nominally ruled by the Mughal Emperor, Shah Alam II, the India Thomas found himself caught in was a maelstrom of violence and chaos.¹⁵ Shah Alam II was a descendant of the Mongols, whose family ruled India almost without question until their defeat at the hands of Nadir Shah, the King of Persia in 1739, an event that inaugurated a period of steady Mughal decline.¹⁶ As Mughal power evaporated, former vassals rose to challenge the authority of the once great empire, turning what were once regional governorships into quasi-independent hereditary kingdoms.¹⁷ By the mid-century, Mughal authority was so diminished that Shah Alam was forced to flee his capital of Delhi in 1758, chased out by his own minister, the eunuch Imad Al-Mulk.¹⁸

It was during this time the European powers, especially the French and the British who established trading centers along the coast of India during the previous two centuries, rose to challenge Mughal authority as well.¹⁹ The British had been in India since 1618, when the EITC successfully secured rights to establish trading posts in the continent from the Mughal Emperor, Jehangir.²⁰ Securing or establishing coastal settlements of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, the EITC engaged in vicious trade wars, first with the Dutch and Portuguese Trading Companies,

¹⁴Keene 75

Henessy 13.

¹⁵Munis D. Faruqi, "At Empire's End: The Nizam, Hyderabad and Eighteenth-Century India," Cambridge University Press, Jan. 2009: 36.

¹⁶Henessy 16.

Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, A Concise History of Modern India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 106.

¹⁷Maya Jasanoff, Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850 (New York: Vintage Books, 2006) 27.

¹⁸Edwardes 40.

Shripad Rama Sharma, Mughal Empire in India: A Systematic Study Including Source Material, Volume 3 (Atlantic Publishers & Dist, 1999) 797.

¹⁹Sharma 716.

²⁰Jasanoff 24.

and then by the mid-eighteenth century, with the French.²¹ When the Anglo-French war broke out in 1739, French and British companies re-staged the broader conflict in India, attempting to seize each other's trading settlements by force using Sepoys, native troops trained in European methods of war and equipped in European fashion, and by allying themselves with local rajahs and princes.²² At the Battle of Plassey in 1757, Robert Clive and the British defeated the Nawab of Bengal, and established British military dominance in Northern India.²³ Although Prime Minister William Pitt refused the EITC's request to govern Bengal, the EITC appointed what amounted to a puppet ruler, Mir Jafar, to rule on their behalf.²⁴ When the efforts of Mir Jafar, allied with Shah Alam II, to wrestle control back from the EITC were crushed in 1764 the EITC secured the right to collect revenues in the province of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa.²⁵ By the time Thomas disembarked and deserted in Madras in 1781, the EITC was the de facto government of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa.²⁶

²¹Jasanoff 24.

²²Jasanoff 26.

Trevor Owen Lloyd, The British Empire 1558-1995 - 2nd Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 74.

²³P.J.Marshall, The Eighteenth Century in Indian History: Evolution or Revolution? (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011) 391.

²⁴Lloyd 77.

²⁵B.L. Grover, and R.R. Sethi, A New Look at Modern Indian History: From 1707 to the Present Day (New Delhi: S. Chand, 2001) 364.

²⁶William Francklin, The History of the Reign of Shah-Aulum, the Present Emperor of Hindustaun: Containing the Transactions of the Court of Delhi and the Neighbouring States During a Period of Thirty-Six Years, Interspersed with Geographical and Topographical Observations on Several of the Principal Cities of Hindustaun (Lahore: Republican Books, 1988) 167.

Lloyd 90.



Figure 2: Shah Alam’s Defeat at the Battle of Buxar 1764

Source: https://www.tutorialspoint.com/modern_indian_history/images/battle_of_buxar.jpg

The growing political and military power of the EITC was a cause for great concern in the British Parliament by the 1780’s. Seen as a source of corruption and “unmerited wealth,” Parliament believed the Company had shown a blatant disregard for Prime Minister Pitt’s instructions after the seizure of Bengal in 1764,²⁷ and instead of leaving Indian political institutions independent and intact, had seized political control of the subcontinent “not for the benefit of the company, but for [the] personal profit” of the EITC.²⁸ Parliament also feared this economic and political power had begun to corrupt English political life, as wealthy Anglo-

²⁷Great Britain Parliament, The History, Debates, And Proceedings of Both Houses of Parliament of Great Britain, From the Year 1743 to the Year 1774: Containing the Most Interesting Motions, Speeches, Resolutions, Reports, Petitions, Evidence, Protests, And Papers, Laid Before Either House. Together With the Supplies And Ways And Means of Each Session. Also Lists of Each Parliament, And of the Divisions Upon the Most Important Questions (London: J. Debrett, 1792)

²⁸Great Britain Parliament 508-510.
Great Britain Parliament 482.
Great Britain Parliament 508-510

Indian “Nabobs,” returned to England, and purchased seats in Parliament, a development that “created general clamour” in England.²⁹ The principal object of this clamor was Robert Clive, the victor of the Battle of Plassey in 1757. Widely viewed in England as a tyrant who had lined his own pockets with the wealth of India, Clive had started out as a lowly clerk in the company who, like Thomas, was born without the advantages of aristocratic blood. Yet, when he returned to England following his victories in India, he was a wealthy man.³⁰ He was able to buy a seat in Parliament among his “betters” with the “spoils of that miserable country” and who brought “dishonor on the English nation.”³¹ To prevent another Robert Clive emerging from the ranks of the EITC, Parliament passed the North Regulating Act in 1773, which brought all territorial acquisitions made by British subjects in India under the British Crown, and made it illegal for private persons to appropriate the revenues of such possessions.³²

²⁹Writing of Horace Walpole appearing in: Percival Spear, Master of Bengal: Clive and His India (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975) 186.

³⁰Spear 48.

Jasanoff 23. Jasanoff refers to him as one of the first “major imperial collectors”

³¹Great Britain Parliament 482.

³²Spear 190.



Figure 3: Lord Robert Clive, Oil, Painted by his Cousin Charles Clive in 1764

Here, Clive's pretention of aristocracy is on full display

Source: <http://www.darwincountry.org/explore/005261.html?sid=>

Nonetheless, when Thomas reached Madras in 1781, the uneducated but quick-witted Catholic farm boy must have known that his best chance for social and economic advancement lay not with the EITC or the British Navy, but in the service of local princes. Little is known about Thomas' early days in Madras, and the first seven years of his Indian career is covered by a single sentence in his memoir. This silence was designed partly to protect a fellow Irishman named Kelley, who had sheltered the young naval deserter, Kelley, who owned an inn in Madras,

hated the British “with typical Irish fervour.”³³ While Thomas could have chosen to join any number of local rulers vying for political power in the region, on Kelley’s suggestion he chose to travel south and join the Polygars, probably so he could disappear from view more easily.³⁴ Upon reaching the Polygars, Thomas joined one of the eighty roving Polygar chiefs and disappeared into a society of over thirty thousand armed peasants.³⁵

Living among the Polygars, who were notorious for their banditry and indiscriminate brutality, Thomas quickly learned about the savage reality of the subcontinent, and his experiences shaped his perception of the native people with whom he now lived. Hennessy describes the young farm boy watching villages burned to the ground, their inhabitants slaughtered, and girls, some of them younger than twelve, chased down and gang-raped by groups of Polygar raiders.³⁶ Shaken to the core, these horrifying sights caused the young Thomas to cling desperately to his European identity, and perhaps, to exaggerate it, and to distance himself from the native people around him.³⁷ Yet, determined to stay alive in a world where life was cheap, he also developed a streak of ruthlessness, ferocity, and fearlessness, all exacerbated by a vicious drinking habit.³⁸ These horrors help explain the brevity with which Francklin covers this time in Thomas’s life. They also explain why Thomas prudently left the ranks of the Polygars after only a year.³⁹

³³Hennessy 22.

³⁴Hennessy 23. - By the late eighteenth century it was commonplace for Europeans like Thomas to serve with local rulers, who had very little interest in the origin of their soldiers. The Polygars were a group of chieftains who refused to associate with any of the European imperial and mercenary factions in India and were known not to keep detailed records of their men. How he got to the Polygars is unknown, but it is speculated he joined one of the marauding bandit gangs in order to avoid being torn apart by them on the journey.

³⁵Hennessy 25.

³⁶Hennessy 27.

³⁷Historian Linda Colley argues that in times of stress (and when there is no incentive to “go native”) Europeans in India clung to their European identities. Usually, according to Colley, this manifests in attempt at maintaining proper European dress, but in Thomas’ case it manifested in an attachment to European values. - Colley 179.

³⁸Hennessy 19.

³⁹Hennessy 26.

Breaking from the Polygars, Thomas enlisted with the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1782, one of the hereditary, independent warlords of northern India, with a European-style Sepoy army complete with cannon and cavalry. While still fighting in the front lines on horseback as a mounted raider, Thomas quickly came to understand the dominance of artillery on the field, a lesson the young soldier would not forget.⁴⁰ Here Thomas learned the value of his European identity amidst the European mercenaries trading on their Western identity to secure upward mobility in the ranks of the Nizam's army. Although there is very little information on his tenure with the Nizam, it is likely he joined the forces of the Nizam because of the large number European mercenaries in it.⁴¹ After his violent experiences with the Polygars, it seems likely he wanted to be around Europeans once again. But although he remained with the Nizam for six years, Thomas didn't advance much, and in 1787 he moved on in search of better prospects.⁴²

In 1787 Thomas made his way to Delhi, which had been recaptured in 1772 by a Maratha army on behalf of the Mughal Emperor.⁴³ By the time Thomas arrived in Delhi, the Marathas were a confederation of squabbling hereditary chiefs and mercenary warlords who acted as feudal landlords, loosely banded together into several separate states. The five states of the Maratha Confederacy were ruled by the Peshwa at Poona, by Sindiah at Ujjain, Holkar at Indore, Bhonsle at Nagpur and Gaikwad at Baroda.⁴⁴ This confederacy was a single administration and political force in name and theory only. While the Peshwa was the nominal head of the "Confederacy", he was the weakest of the five rulers. His commands were often refused, or

⁴⁰Hennessy 27.

Romesh C. Butalia, The Evolution of the Artillery in India: From the Battle of Plassey (1757) to the Revolt of 1857 (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Ltd, 1998) 110.

⁴¹Hennessy 31.

⁴²Francklin, Military Memoirs 19.

⁴³Sharma 741.

⁴⁴U.N. Chakravorty, Anglo-Maratha Relations and Malcolm 1798-1830 (New Delhi: Associated, 1979) 17. Francklin The History 33.

challenged outright, unless they coincided with the wishes of the other state leaders.⁴⁵ Among these states, the Sindiah's were the strongest, and it was they who had marched Shah Alam through the gates of Delhi in 1772.⁴⁶

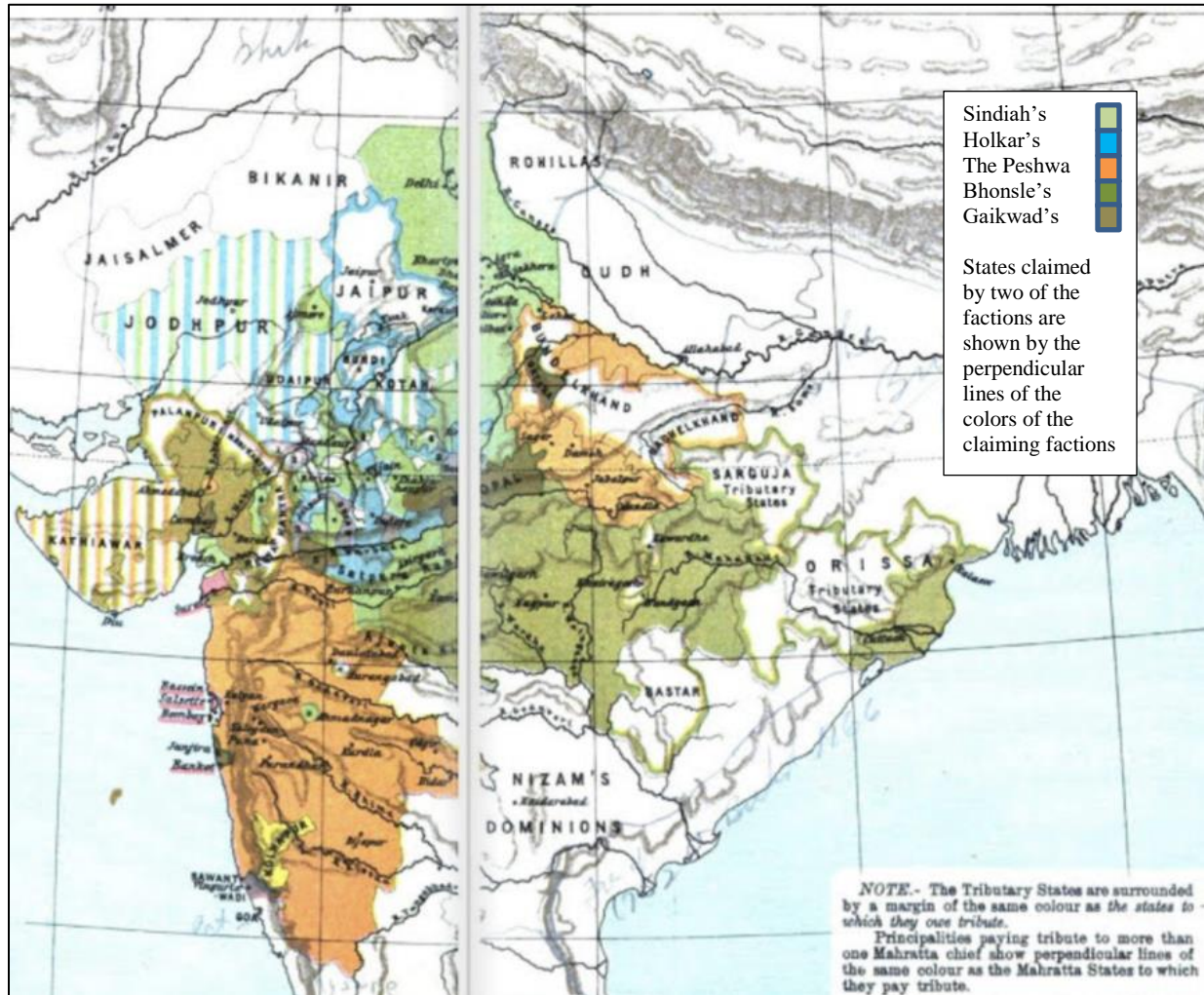


Figure 4: Territories of the Principle Maratha States in 1795
Charles Joppen, "Historical Atlas of India: For the Use of High Schools, Colleges, and Private Students, 3rd ed." Print.

The territory around Delhi was a war zone, and the different factions of Shah Alam II's crumbling empire had few qualms about raiding each other if opportunity arose.⁴⁷ As a result,

⁴⁵Chakravorty 15.

⁴⁶Francklin, *The History* 38.

there was always a need for soldiers in the region. Thomas soon heard of an opening in the court of a remarkable woman named Begum Sumru, ruler of Sardhana, and the only openly Catholic member Shah Alam II's court. Begum had risen from relative obscurity as a seventeen year old dancing girl who seduced the vicious Austrian mercenary warlord Walter Reinhardt. He was roughly thirty years her senior. Reinhardt, like Thomas, deserted his ship, and joined the French army as a private, eventually working his way up to a prominent position within Shah Alam II's court. "Sombre," as Reinhardt came to be known, was notorious for his ruthlessness, and was remembered widely for the 1764 Massacre at Patna, where he ordered the throats of forty-nine British prisoners of war slit as they were sitting at dinner with him, then ordered their bodies cut to pieces.⁴⁸ Whether due to her beauty, charm or intelligence, this callous butcher of men settled down with Begum, and, perhaps seeking comfort, Reinhardt turned to religion. Begum became a Catholic to appease her husband, and finding the religion to her liking, remained true to it until her dying day.⁴⁹ "A born politician," Begum was known to be as ruthless as her husband, and it was these traits, coupled with the potential of her hand in marriage (and the inheritance of both a governorship, and the wealth that accompanied it) that allowed her to keep control of her husband's officers, and thus his army upon Reinhardt's death in 1778.⁵⁰

Thomas would have heard Begum was notorious for favoring Europeans, and the ethnic composition of her officer core and court had not changed since her husband's death nine years before Thomas' arrival. While there was a tradition of Europeans serving under South Asian rulers and soldiers, Begum's forces and court were the most "European" in the North of India

⁴⁷Sharma 478.

⁴⁸Mark Bence-Jones, Clive of India (London: Constable, 1988) 205.

⁴⁹Brajendra N. Banerjee, Begam Samru (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons, 1925) 203.

⁵⁰Banerjee 185.

Cecil L. Burn, From Slave to Princess (Times of Indian Annual, 1923) in Hennessy 46.

and her palace was filled with European articles of all kinds procured from Calcutta.⁵¹ Thomas would have also heard from bitter locals that while Begum frequently dined with her European officers, natives were never allowed to step foot inside the enclosure of her palace.⁵²

It is likely Thomas found a kindred soul in Begum. Like him, she had started with nothing, rising through the ranks of the Mughal court through her wits and beauty as far as Thomas knew. Also like Thomas, Begum was a Catholic, a particularly important fact for the young Irishman who was prohibited by British laws from holding any public office.⁵³ She also understood and liked Europeans, and like her former husband possessed a ruthless streak that matched that of Thomas. The young soldier must have reckoned that Begum was his best chance of success. Therefore, Thomas sought employment with Begum Sumru, and was commissioned as a lieutenant, one of eighty Europeans on her payroll. Tall, dark, handsome, with a quick wit and, when not in one of his tempers, capable of seeming to be a gentle spirit, Thomas was quickly noticed by Begum, and quickly established a reputation as a skilled military organizer.⁵⁴ Thomas had not spent the six years with the Nizam of Hyderabad idly, and, using the lessons he learned during his service there, he organized Begum's forces into a mirror of Nizam's. His rough life of campaigning with the Polygars as a foot soldier had given him the skills which allowed him to build a rapport with his men, traits that immediately made him one of Begum's personal favorites.⁵⁵ It is widely assumed by Hennessy and Edwards that Thomas became Begum's lover, and Francklin too hints at this arrangement, although he never openly states it.⁵⁶

⁵¹Hennessy 38.

⁵²Edwardes 241.

⁵³Catholics were generally prosecuted under the Test Act passed in 1673, which required all military and public officials to take an oath of allegiance to the Crown and receive the sacraments of the Church of England. As a result, any practicing Catholic was almost always barred from public office, as they did not receive the sacrament in the Church of England.

⁵⁴Edwardes 241.

⁵⁵Hennessy 50.

⁵⁶Francklin, Military Memoirs 20.



Figure 5: Portrait of Begum Samru, in Her Later Years

Source:swarajyamag.com/magazine/the-incredible-story-of-begum-samru.

Thomas arrived in Delhi at the height of Maratha ascendancy. Only a year after he arrived in 1787, Ghulam Qadir, a chieftain of the Rohillas, a tribe who resided in the highlands of the Afghan mountains and nominally swore loyalty to the Shah, stormed his palace and took Shah Alam II hostage. Qadir sought the legendary wealth of the Shah, but these riches had

disappeared along with the Shah's authority, so he had the Shah's eyes torn out and a likeness of Qadir's face carved into the Shah's chest..⁵⁷ When Sindiah heard of the outrage, he dispatched his general Ranah Khan to capture Qadir, ordering him to rip out Qadir's eyes and send them to Shah Alam II in a box. In gratitude, the Shah named Mahadji Sindiah the vice-regent of the Emperor and the virtual military commander of northern India.⁵⁸

In 1788, as Shah Alam II was still trying to reestablish his personal authority in the region, and to subdue a particularly troublesome Rajput chief, Thomas was able to demonstrate his military capacity to Begum and to the Shah. The Rajputs were a collection of tribes who were recent members of the Mughal Empire, and their independent-minded chiefs would often rebel.⁵⁹ During one such rebellion Rajput forces attacked and routed the Shah's forces. Begum, who was accompanying the Shah, rushed to his aid with Thomas at her side. Thomas, using artillery and deadly grapeshot to turn the tide and obliterate the Rajput forces, defeated the threat to the Emperor's life.⁶⁰

Shah Alam II then asked Begum to take responsibility for the defense of the Northern provinces, in which Delhi was situated, against Sikh raiders who had raided across the Punjab border for decades, and Begum put the young Irishman in charge. A collection of tribes residing in the Punjab north of Delhi, the Sikhs were known for their "incredible marches" and "uncommonly expert" use of arms.⁶¹ Thomas described the Sikhs in at great length to Franklin, depicting them as "imposing and formidable" with long, uncut black hair and beards, extravagant armor and arms, and Spartan tastes in clothing and food. Not yet the strictly religious group we

⁵⁷Hennessy 52.

Sharma 140.

⁵⁸Banerji 248.

⁵⁹Sharma 156.

⁶⁰Francklin, *The History* 167.

⁶¹Francklin, *Military Memoirs* 110.

know today, they allowed anyone to join them but would not allow intermarriage, and were considered to live in a purely military state.⁶²

Consequently, in 1788 Thomas found himself in the fort of Tappal, just South-East of Delhi, as a military governor and civil administrator of the Northern Mughal province within his first year of service to Begum. It is very likely this rapid success went to his head, especially given the fact that he could neither write nor read.⁶³ This he quickly remedied, learning to read and write Farsi (Persian) and Hindustani from his mistress -- lessons that usually occurred in her bedroom according to Hennessy.⁶⁴ Determined to succeed, Thomas never lost a battle against the raiding Sikhs during his service under Begum, and *Jahazi-Sahib* (His Honor the Sailor) as he was now known, became legendary amongst the people he would mercilessly hunt down, riding and fighting alongside his men.⁶⁵ It seemed that with the adoption of this name, Thomas willingly began to embrace the customs of the Marathas, encouraged, like many Europeans at this time, by success and by women, to “go native.”⁶⁶ But in many ways *Jahazi-Sahib* kept a sense of his own European identity, understanding that this was vital to his status in northern Indian society, where Europeans were valued by locals for their “innate military aptitude” in much the same way the British would later come to value the “innate military aptitude” of

⁶²In the developing understanding driven by Evangelicals about human equality in the late 18th Century, there needed to be justification for authoritarian rule and imperialism. This is amply provided by Thomas’s anthropological segments of his memoirs. Whether it be Rajputs, Sikhs or Marathas, Francklin is keen to demonstrate the savagery of their culture, and includes any mentions of their failings, cowardice, and/or lack of loyalty/unreliableness. However, there is a clear distinction between the good, tamable allies (Rajputs), the desirable, but normally unreliable (Sikhs) and the useless ones (Marathas). These “racial” attributes are in fact Thomas’ personal experiences with the various individuals whom comprised these tribes. It is not a coincidence that Thomas gives such a favorable analysis to his eventual soldiers (the Rajputs).

⁶³Hennessy 55.

⁶⁴Hennessy 56.

⁶⁵Herbert Compton, A Particular Account of the European Military Adventurers of Hindustan (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893) 112.

⁶⁶Colley 170-193.

“martial races” such as the Scottish Highlanders, Zulus and the Gurkhas.⁶⁷ In essence, Thomas was between two worlds, clinging to his European identity as he sought to navigate the challenges of a new and highly volatile culture.

Thomas’ success clearly generated resentment amongst his peers in Begum’s court, especially amongst his French rivals for Begum’s favor. They were headed by an aristocratic Frenchman named Lavassoult. As far as Thomas was concerned, Lavassoult was the living embodiment of French stereotypes: lazy, parasitic, prideful and despotic, yet possessing a burning ambition and courtly charms only rivaled by his sense of entitlement. The distaste was mutual, as Lavassoult deeply resented that an illiterate, uneducated farm boy was Begum’s personal favorite, and had been gifted administrative control over the territory surrounding the fort of Tappal. Worse for Lavassoult, Thomas was incredibly successful at every task he was given. In light of this, Lavassoult declared himself the ‘inveterate enemy of Mr. Thomas’ and sought to undermine the upstart at every opportunity.⁶⁸ He would receive his chance in 1792, while Thomas was deployed on the frontier. Lavassoult, after months of courtship, was invited to the Begum’s bedchamber and replaced Thomas as Begum’s favorite.⁶⁹

Although Thomas had fallen out of Begum’s favor, Begum still saw some value in the Irishman, and in an attempt to keep the useful soldier allied and subordinate to her, and perhaps feeling guilt at so callously replacing him, Begum married Thomas to her illegitimate daughter that same year.⁷⁰ This did not appease Thomas and, despite accepting the offer, he was enraged at being replaced, retreating to his fort in Tappal, and declaring the territory he had been

⁶⁷Heather Streets, Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011) 3.

⁶⁸Francklin, Military Memoirs 56.

⁶⁹Hennessy 59.

⁷⁰Hennessy 59.

- She would later refuse to join Thomas on his return to Ireland, opting instead to return to live with Begum.

administering was now his own. In response, Begum took Thomas' family hostage, and when Thomas, with signature brashness, attempted to rescue them he was captured and thrown into a cell. Only the timely intervention of the Shah, who remembered his service and asked Begum to spare his life, saved him from execution. Agreeing not to kill Thomas, Begum instead had him dragged unceremoniously to the British border at the port of Anupshahr.⁷¹

But regardless of how exactly Thomas ended up in Anupshahr, in 1792, his career in India seemed over, and Begum's treatment created a sense of bitterness and distrust towards figures of authority which manifested into a spark of insubordination, which would shape Thomas' actions in the coming years. Defeated, but not broken, Thomas clearly still did not wish to serve the British, or return home, and so decided to salvage his military career in India.

Yet, despite his unwillingness to serve European forces or return home, it would appear that Thomas prided himself on the only thing he had left: his profitable European identity. Accompanied by a band of around two hundred soldiers who remained loyal to him, Thomas once again sought employment and opportunities with the native princes as a European military consultant. In 1793, he was approached by a Maratha chief named Appa Khandi Rao. Appa had been one of Maharaja Sindiah's general-administrators, but following a military defeat found himself unable to pay the salaries of his soldiers. He had also fallen out of favor with Sindiah.⁷²

This was in part due to the fact that Appa's chief European consultant, a French adventurer

⁷¹Edwardes 241.

- There are differing accounts to the actualities of this event. While Francklin states that Thomas peacefully resigned and "betook himself" to Anupshahr, Edwardes' version (provided above) seems far more likely. In a time when most European adventurers were more interested in lining their own pockets than in looking out for the interests of their local employers, the fact that Thomas only had the equivalent of fifty pounds sterling when he left Begum's service, very little considering the amount of money he managed for her, suggests that most of his wealth was confiscated. Hennessy, for his part, interpreted this little sum to be evidence of selfless loyalty and lingering romantic attachment to Begum.

Francklin, Military Memoirs 26.

Hennessy 60.

⁷²Francklin, Military Memoirs 43.

named De Boigne had recently left Appa's service to serve directly under Sindiah, taking nearly half a million Rupees from Appa's war funds with him.⁷³ In need of a replacement, but with no excess funds available, and facing a mutiny, Appa turned to the rejected Irishmen hoping for a cheap and readily available military commander. Stinging from his recent defeat, and hoping to return to Sindiah's good graces, Appa hoped that Thomas would, as he had with Begum's forces, be able to raise and train a new European model army. Appa commissioned Thomas to raise an army of one thousand infantry, and a hundred horsemen.⁷⁴

Thomas did, but when it came time to pay for the new recruit's salaries, Appa informed Thomas to collect the money himself from the provinces of Tijara, Tapukara and Firozpur. Thomas had been Begum's Administer, and therefore realized that his troops would not serve on the promise of future pay. And, sure enough, on the march to the provinces to collect the taxes to pay his men, Thomas' troops rebelled. Thomas was able to put down the revolt, and returned to Delhi promising his men that he would secure their pay and determined to confront Appa. Still stinging from his banishment by Begum, and afraid that his troops might tear him apart if he returned empty handed, Thomas took the opportunity to unleash months of pent up aggression, intimidating Appa into providing fourteen thousand rupees for his men and a bond to cover the rest of his expenses.⁷⁵ Thomas' ability to deliver on his promise set a precedent for his men, securing their personal loyalty to him. At this point, Thomas' brash actions saved his Indian military career, but at the expense of alienating himself from his second employer in a matter of months. It is becoming increasingly clear that while valued for his natural military aptitude, Thomas' personality, and habit of challenging his employers was starting to estrange the Irishman from those around him, leaving him increasingly isolated.

⁷³Hennesy 61.

⁷⁴Francklin, Military Memoirs 43.

⁷⁵Compton 116.

Thomas set out for the provinces given to him by Appa, and on the way demonstrated his vengeful, and independent streak by detouring from his initial route to carve a swathe through Begum's territories, stripping every village he came across of its valuables. When Begum sent a force to raid Thomas provinces in retaliation, Thomas destroyed it in an ambush.⁷⁶

Despite the conflict with Thomas, Appa needed him to pacify his increasingly restless and financially strained provinces, a task at which Thomas proved himself to be impetuous, but effective. In one incident in 1793, he seized the domain of one of a rebellious Brahmin official named Ganga Bishen. Bishen's forces attacked Thomas' encampment at night, and Thomas awoke to the screams of his retreating men. Emerging from his tent without a weapon, he sprinted toward a hill just behind the overrun trenches, and snatching a blade from a fleeing soldier, Thomas engaged six of the enemy soldiers. Yelling like a madman, Thomas killed three and held the line against the others until Bishen's troops retreated in the face of reinforcements. Bleeding heavily from his injuries, he then proceeded to chase the enemy back to the walls of their fort, yelling abuse at everyone within earshot.⁷⁷ After the battle, Thomas ensured that the worst injured men were placed in his own tent. Gestures like this and the bravery Thomas displayed, helped to secure the loyalty of his men in a region where personal loyalty was an essential but rare characteristic.⁷⁸ These feats only encouraged the image of Thomas as

⁷⁶Francklin, Military Memoirs 44.

It would appear that Francklin was keen to draw attention away from Thomas' vengeful nature, as this portion of the memoir is actually quite vague as to what he is doing in these provinces. Francklin prefers to focus on Thomas' individual heroics in these battles.

⁷⁷Francklin, Military Memoirs 46.

⁷⁸Francklin, Military Memoirs 47.

Francklin viewed the compassion Thomas demonstrated towards his men as a sign of his humanity and ethnocentrism, while Henessy sees it as an individually heroic act. But, despite the slight differing of opinions, both Francklin and Henessy used this moment as evidence that Thomas was a quintessentially British hero.

impetuous, independent man, his soldiers personal loyalty to him alone deepening the unease with which he was regarded by the Native Princes around him.

When Thomas returned to Appa in 1794, after the siege against Bishen, he discovered Appa had been withholding his tribute from Sindiah, (it was likely the fourteen thousand rupees Thomas had received were part of this tribute) and Sindiah had sent his tax collector, Luckwa Dada, to collect. Realizing his predicament, Appa had mortgaged his territories to Luckwa until he could gather the necessary funds, and was being kept as a prisoner in Luckwa's camp until the funds were collected.⁷⁹ Of course, Thomas' properties were among those mortgaged, and Luckwa now technically controlled them. Thomas saw this decision, made without his consent, as an act of weakness and treachery by his native employer, a perception which encouraged Thomas' distrust and contempt toward figures of authority in his life. Despite this resentment, Thomas, knowing that the only way to reclaim his property was to pay off Appa's debt, therefore set out to raise the funds Appa required, and when the commander of the city of Bryee refused to pay his taxes to Appa, attacked the city.

The siege of Bryee was a vicious one, and it had a lasting effect on Thomas' perception of himself. During the final assault on the fort, Thomas' forces were pushed back, and during the retreat one of Thomas' officers was captured. Watching from outside the walls of the burning city, Thomas was mortified "to perceive the merciless enemy seize on the wounded officer, and with savage barbarity....[throw] him into the fire." That now engulfed the city.⁸⁰ The sound of the officer's scream seemed to cause something in Thomas to snap, and he and his troops, "equally enraged by this spectacle," surged forward with an "ardour that was irresistible."⁸¹

⁷⁹Hennessy 67.

⁸⁰Francklin, Military Memoirs 47.

⁸¹Francklin, Military Memoirs 47.

As many of the enemy garrison threw down their arms and fled into the surrounding forests, for the first time, Thomas ordered his men to hunt them down and slaughter each and every one of them. As a man who clung to the rules of war and regarded military professionalism as an essential part of his European identity, this outbreak of savagery was a shock to his sense of self. In hindsight, this action struck Thomas a little too close to those of the Polygars whom Thomas had consciously distanced himself from, as evidenced by the conspicuous omission of this period in his life from the otherwise very detailed and thorough memoir. Thomas was clearly concerned with being seen as descending into savagery, shown by his need to justify this particular episode by making appeals to native barbarism, repeatedly mentioning his enemies' "savagery," and his own native troops' desire for the slaughter as justification for his action.⁸²

When Thomas returned once again to Appa to report his success, he was once again informed there was not enough money to pay his soldiers, and this time was ordered to disband his army. When Thomas confronted Appa,⁸³ the latter broke down almost immediately and revealed that this was part of a plan, devised by Sindiah, to drive a wedge between Thomas and Appa so that he could hire the young successful commander himself. But when Luckwa, acting on Sindiah's behalf, offered Thomas the command of an army twice the size of the one he currently commanded, Thomas "to his credit as a soldier" refused to abandon Appa.⁸⁴ It's likely that this decision was tied directly to two things. Firstly, Thomas knew that he could control Appa, and secondly because remaining loyal to Appa reaffirmed Thomas' professional soldier identity to himself (challenged by his recent slaughter) through the emphasis of honor and duty.

⁸²Francklin, Military Memoirs 48.

It is interesting to note that there is no criticism for this action by Francklin.

⁸³Francklin, Military Memoirs 48.

⁸⁴ Francklin, Military Memoirs 51.

While his refusal of Luckwa's offer endeared Thomas to Appa, it alienated him from Sindiah, a powerful and influential man in his own right.

Nonetheless, to placate Sindiah, Appa agreed to send Thomas to join with Sindiah's forces in a siege of the town of Sohawalgarh, for late payment of taxes. At this stage Thomas may have been feeling over-confident. Refusing to follow the plans laid out by Sindiah's generals, or to wait for reinforcements, Thomas defied a direct order and stormed the city by himself, claiming the choicest spoils, including the cannons, as booty.⁸⁵ Francklin believed he was frustrated by the snail's pace of Sindiah's officers, and Hennessy suggests Thomas wanted to seize enough of the spoils to help Appa, but just as likely it was an attempt to claim the entire city's wealth for himself.⁸⁶ This insubordination and unchecked ambition was noticed by Sindiah, and their relationship steadily soured from this point onwards, although since Thomas had ensured Sindiah got his share of the loot from the city, there was little Sindiah could do to reprimand Thomas. Thomas was growing increasingly isolated from everyone around him, and his insubordinate tendencies was only being rewarded with each passing success and unpunished slight against figures of authority.

The unexpected death of Mahadaji Sindiah Maratha of a fever later that year added to the growing chaos of the region.⁸⁷ Sindiah's successor was Daulat Rao Sindiah, his fifteen years old nephew, who inherited most of Mahadaji's armies and titles. But sensing potential for gain in the new state of affairs, Sindiah's governors were quickly at one another's throats plunging the region into a state of permanent anarchy. Daulat Rao Sindiah's attempts to mediate these fights

⁸⁵Francklin, Military Memoirs 54.

⁸⁶Francklin, Military Memoirs 54.
Hennessy 71.

Edwardes 242.

⁸⁷Radhey S. Chaurasia, History of the Marathas (New-Delhi: Atlantic, 2004) 13.
Edwardes 240.

would keep him occupied for the next five or six years.⁸⁸ One of the Maratha chiefs who was taking advantage of Mahadaji's death and Daulat Sindiah's fragile authority was Appa, who was determined to rebuild his treasury by any means possible.

It was Appa's treatment of Bishen who had been defeated and captured by Thomas that began to germinate Thomas' perception of the Marathas as innately untrustworthy and corrupt, which only further deepened Thomas' aversion to Native authority. Appa had released Bishen from captivity after he had paid Appa the taxes he was owed, but when Appa realized the true extent of the Brahmin's wealth, and the fact that Daulat Rao Sindiah was unable to protect Bishen, Appa ordered Thomas to re-capture the Brahmin. Thomas did so, but then refused to deliver him to Appa, another sign of Thomas' increasingly independent behavior. Appa demanded Thomas meet with him, and when Thomas arrived at the prearranged meeting place he was immediately held at sword point and ordered to disclose the whereabouts of Bishen. Thomas pushed through the armed guards and burst into the next room to confront Appa. Towering above his cowering employer, Thomas, enraged by the act of betrayal, somehow managed to maintain his composure. Hand on the hilt of his sword, he tersely gave the stunned Appa a customary compliment before informing him he would not serve him any longer.⁸⁹

Quickly regretting the magnitude of his error, Appa immediately attempted to patch things up, offering Thomas one profuse apology after another.⁹⁰ But Thomas faced his own dilemma. Unlike Begum, Appa was no independent lord, but a follower of Sindiah, and if Thomas declared his independence of Appa and kept the provinces he had been given, he would be branded as a bandit and have to face the full might of the Sindiah faction. Emperor Shah

⁸⁸Edwardes 240.

Chaurasia 14.

⁸⁹Franklin *Military Memoirs* 64.

⁹⁰Hennessy 73.

Alam II had saved Thomas once before from the wrath of Begum, but there was no guarantee he would do it again. Moreover, Thomas did not want to renounce his territories and start all over again, and he needed money to pay his soldiers. Therefore, realizing he had Appa at his mercy, he accepted his apologies and returned to his service once more. It is clear to all that Thomas desired to be independent, but had, at this point no means of permanently securing it.

At this point, Thomas' past caught up with him, as his ex-lover, employer, and now enemy, Begum, had rebuilt her army, and was determined to make Thomas pay for his past raids on her territory. In 1795 Begum, along with her new husband Lavassoult, marched into Thomas' territory with a force that outnumbered his two to one.⁹¹ Fortunately for Thomas, he still had a strong base of support amongst many of Begum's officers, who openly opposed the order to attack Thomas. Lavassoult's subsequent mistreatment of his men in response to these protests led to murderous resentment, and in the rebellion that followed, Begum was captured, and Lavassoult committed suicide, his vengeful soldiers proceeding to "commit every act of insult and indignity upon his corpse," before throwing the mutilated carcass into a ditch to rot under the baking Indian sun.⁹² Begum now had no one to turn to. Shah Alam II, blind and firmly under the control of Sindiah, could be not be expected to help. So in desperation, she turned to Thomas, appealing for his protection and help. Thomas refused to help.

The unease and estrangement fostered by Thomas' increasingly evident uncontrollable nature and growing power finally boiled over, and during one of his tours in his province, Thomas was ambushed by a group of bandits who seem to have been paid by Appa to attack Thomas.⁹³ Appa pleaded ignorance, and he may very well have been innocent, but the episode did nothing to relax the growing tensions between Thomas and his employer and his distrust of

⁹¹Hennessy 75.

⁹²Franklin, Military Memoirs 61.

⁹³Franklin, Military Memoirs 73.

the Native chiefs around him. Thomas, who remarked to Francklin about the matter that “a Maratha is seldom at loss for an excuse” seems to have believed he had been betrayed yet again.⁹⁴ Jaded by his experiences, he began to develop a deep mistrust of the native rulers he was serving.

Events however now took an unexpected turn, when Appa revealed to Thomas that he was dying, and asked to meet with him to discuss the possibility of Thomas acting as a regent for his young and inexperienced heir. Flattered but still highly suspicious, Thomas did not answer, turning instead to the task of defeating a large Sikh force that was raiding the Maratha territories, a victory that, in a similar way as it had his predecessor, drew the approving eye of Daulat Rao Sindiah.⁹⁵ Then, on his way back from this campaign, Thomas received a letter from Begum offering him 120,000 rupees (more than double the yearly revenue of a market town) for his aid. Perhaps not surprisingly, Thomas agreed to help and marched on her rebellious troops, who surrendered almost immediately. Hennessy, believes it was because he still had feelings for Begum, while Edwardes suggests the motivation was purely financial, and Francklin attempts to establish that it was out of loyalty to a former employer.⁹⁶ But Thomas may also have been trying to regain an ally and repair a relationship, as in Thomas’ mind he was very likely to be in need of a new employer soon.

In fact, while Thomas was rescuing Begum, he learned that Appa had drowned himself in the river Jumna to escape the pain of his illness. Appa’s death in 1797 marked a new phase in Thomas’ career.⁹⁷ Appa’s successor, Vavon Rao, was young and inexperienced, and Maratha

⁹⁴Franklin, Military Memoirs 74.

⁹⁵Franklin, Military Memoirs 93.

⁹⁶Franklin, Military Memoirs 95.

Hennessy 80.

Edwardes 244.

⁹⁷Franklin, Military Memoirs 99.

chiefs took full advantage of his naivete to estrange him from his capable general. They easily convinced him that Thomas was too dangerous, ambitious, and uncontrollable to be left unchecked, and Vavon Rao ordered Thomas to give up his property. Thomas refused. But unfortunately for Thomas, Sindiah sided with Vavon, and Begum also lent her troops to the young Rao. Although Thomas fought Vavon and his allies to a standstill, and established a truce with Vavon, the Marathas, and Begum in 1798, his rebellion permanently alienated him from the Marathas.⁹⁸ Tired of being betrayed by his Maratha employers, Thomas decided to establish his own Raj in the no man's land between Maratha lands and the Punjab, close to the territories he had administered under Begum.

So, in 1798, Thomas decided to go it alone, choosing the city of Hansi as his capital. Hansi was little more than a ruined shell of a city used by local bandits as a base of operations. Most of the surrounding territory was populated by independent chiefs, who Thomas reckoned would be easy to assimilate into his kingdom. Thomas took the city and rebuilt it, an achievement that Franklin used to describe Thomas as an altruistic "bringer of civilization." Thomas's actual motivation was probably to increase the revenues of the city, which would in turn allow him to have the funds to increase the size of his army.⁹⁹ Thomas was very aware of his isolation. To the North were the marauding Sikh tribes, and to the South were the members of Shah Alam's court, most of whom he had spurned, raided, or harmed in one fashion or another. Thomas now realized he needed new allies, and reluctantly turned to the greatest power he knew -- the British Empire. After almost two decades of avoiding serving the British Empire, in 1799 Thomas wrote to General Wellesley, offering his allegiance and territories to the British.¹⁰⁰ At this point, Wellesley and the British were expanding and attempting to counteract French

⁹⁸Franklin, Military Memoirs 120.

⁹⁹Franklin, Military Memoirs 124, 133.

¹⁰⁰Franklin, Military Memoirs 133.

influence in the area.¹⁰¹ They had just annexed the Kingdom of Mysore to the South that year, and Thomas hoped they would accept his offer. But not wishing to be dragged into another war, they declined Thomas' offer.¹⁰²

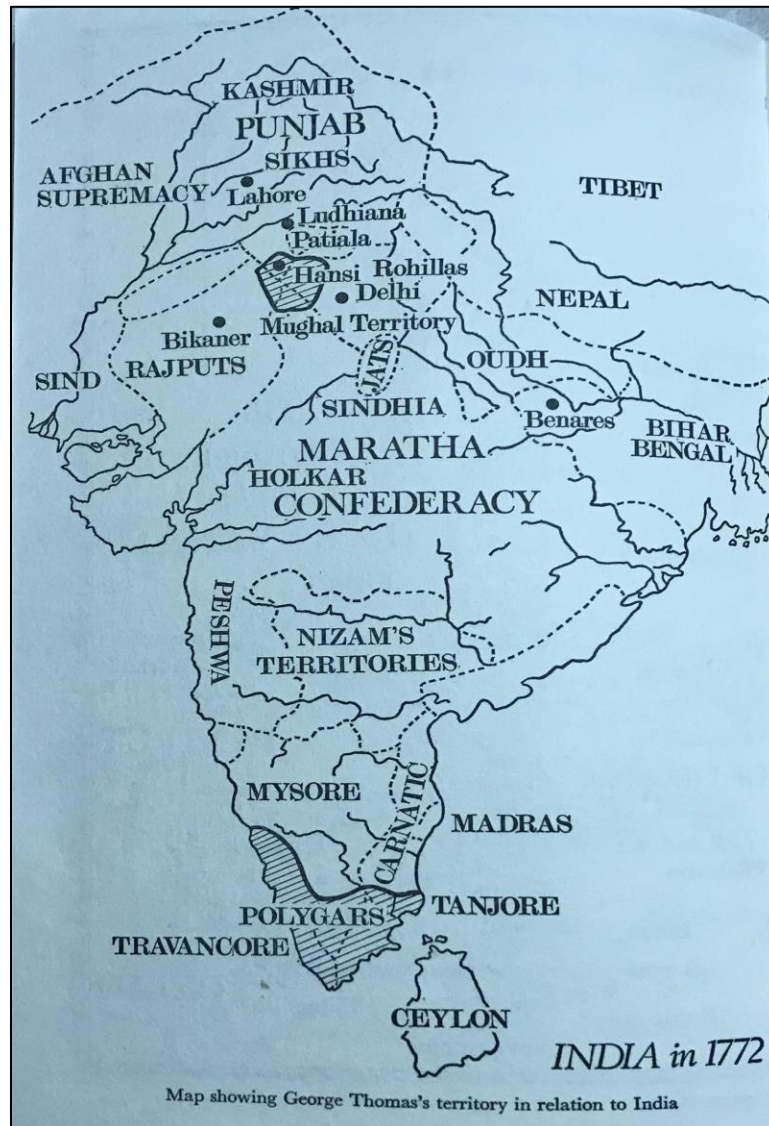


Figure 6: George Thomas's Territory in Relation to India
Source: Maurice Hennessy, "The Rajah from Tipperary." 90. Print.

¹⁰¹Jasanoff 120, 165.

¹⁰²Lloyd 113.

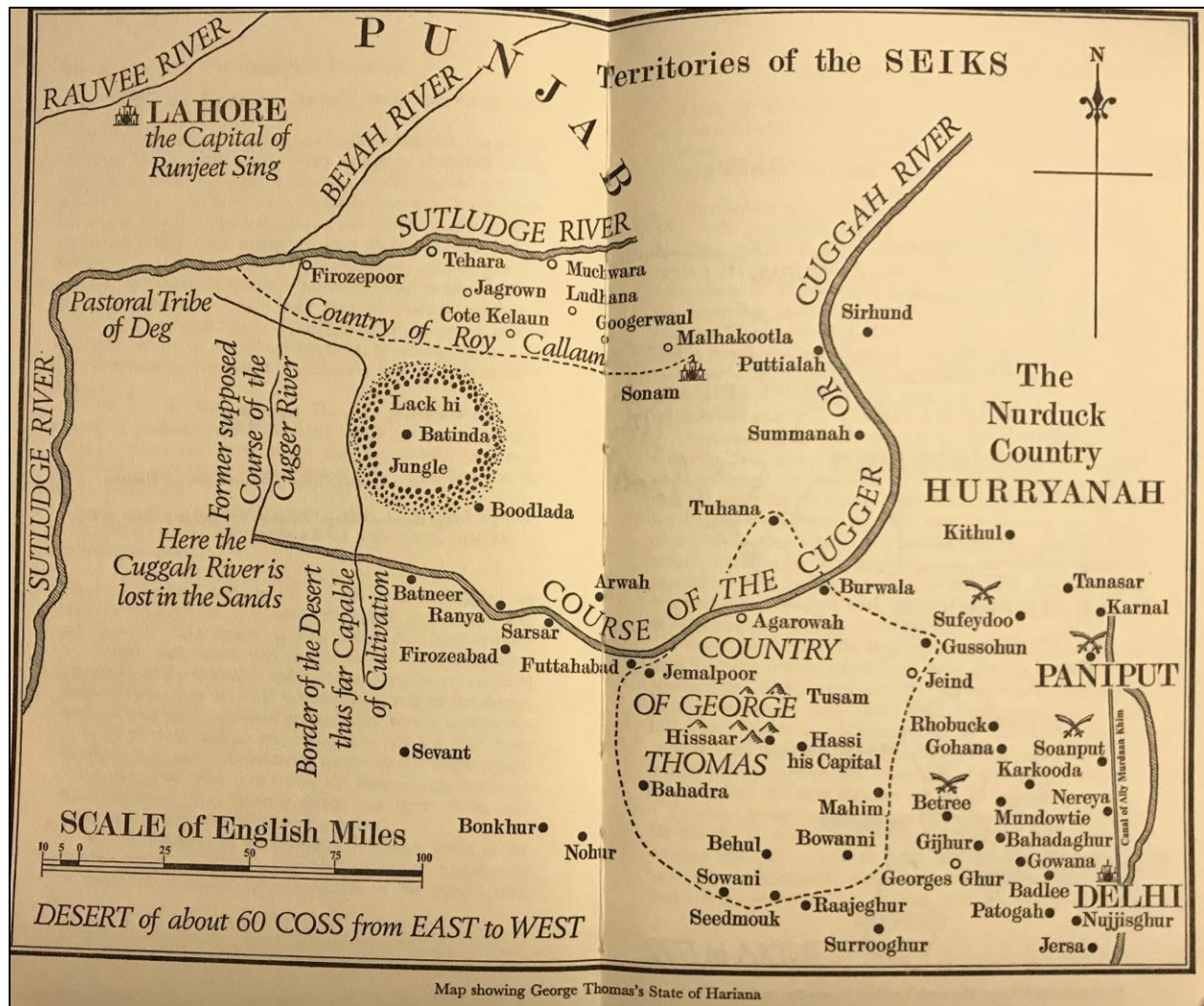


Figure 7: A close up of George Thomas' Empire
Source: Maurice Hennessy, "The Rajah from Tipperary." 88-89. Print.

It was around this time that Thomas began to call himself as “The Rajah from Tipperary.” This title, which merged the local title and his place of origin, suggests the ambiguity of his place as an Irishman and a local Indian warlord on the edges of the expanding British empire. Revealingly Thomas identified more with Tipperary than with Ireland, and chose not to call himself the “British Rajah,” even though this might have helped in his negotiations with the British. The failure of these negotiations, forced Thomas to try to strengthen his own position by expanding into the Punjab, the homeland of the Sikhs, in order to raise money for the expansion

of his army. To ensure the continued loyalty of this army, Thomas also introduced pensions, taking a leaf from the British tactic book, to ensure native loyalty.¹⁰³ As his revenue's increased, so too did his army, and as he recruited more men, Thomas began to take careful notes on the various "races" of the Punjab.¹⁰⁴

Thomas was particularly interested in the Rajputs, from whom he had rescued Shah Alam in 1788. Thomas believed the Rajputs resented serving under the despotism of the Rajah of Jaipur, who Thomas noted had wasted a fortune "frugally built up by the rulers ancestors... in extravagance and luxury."¹⁰⁵ Determined to "liberate" the tribe and recruit them to his service, Thomas marched on their homeland of Jaipur.¹⁰⁶ Here he once again came into contact with Vavon Rao, who had been sent by Sindiah to crush the Rajah of Jaipur with a force twelve times larger than Thomas' army. Seeing an opportunity to mitigate his losses by taking advantage of Vavon's force, Thomas joined them but the campaign did not go well. Thomas grew disgusted with Rao and the cowardice of his troops as well as the "vulture like," way that his army plundered the surrounding countryside.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³Francklin, Military Memoirs 139.

¹⁰⁴Franklin, Military Memoirs 365. - These sweeping generalizations would be taken as literal fact by Francklin, and later the orientalist who would read Thomas' work.

Orientalism: a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western Experience.) that draw conclusions about the Orient: its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on from elaborate accounts concerning the Orient - Edward W. Said, Orientalism (Pantheon Books, 1978) 9.

-Thomas analyzed everything about the tribes that surrounded him: social values, family structures, religion, weapons, alliances, making sweeping generalizations for simplicity. Thomas' primary concern was the militancy of the tribes. He was looking for anything, such as a religious conflict or tribal conflict, which could cause disruptions in his ranks. In trying to build the perfect army, Thomas inadvertently mirrored the British orientalist views of the Despot East, generalizing tribal populations, and becoming more like the British empire than he had ever imagined. These notes themselves would contribute a great deal to the sponsorship of the memoir by the powerful members of the EITC administration, as his notes were used much for the same purposes as Thomas used them. Francklin was obsessed with these notes, and published Thomas' notes in full throughout the memoir.

¹⁰⁵Franklin, Military Memoirs 180.

¹⁰⁶Franklin, Military Memoirs 181.

¹⁰⁷Franklin, Military Memoirs 182.

Hennessy 110.

The decisive battle came when the Rajah of Jaipur and his allies, who had been trailing the army of Thomas and Rao, arrived with 40,000 men, trapping Thomas and his allies' 3,000 troops against the walls of the city. Thomas was irritated by the 'whining [of his] cowardly allies, who were convinced of their imminent defeat given the difference in numbers between the forces.¹⁰⁸ His efforts to bolster the morale of Rao's troops however, and to prevent them from breaking and fleeing the moment the battle started proved fruitless.¹⁰⁹ On the day of the battle, the Mahrattas refused to leave their tents, and Thomas was forced to sally forth with his small contingent of men catching the Rajputs off guard by the sheer audacity of his assault. Sensing the possibility of victory, the Maratha cavalry now rushed from their tents, charging past Thomas' position and after the fleeing enemy. When the Rajputs suddenly rallied and turned about, the Maratha immediately turned and fled without firing a shot, straight through Thomas' lines. To his credit, Thomas refused to fire through his allies, and was left with no other option but to brace for the Rajput wave in hot pursuit of the fleeing Marathas.

Although Thomas broke the counter charge and held the field, he did so with heavy losses. In disgust, he pulled back to his encampment and "incredibly indignant about the nature of his allies" and "caring very little about their predicament" locked the Mahrata cavalry out of his camp, leaving them to be slaughtered against the barricade wall by the second wave of Rajputs watching from the hastily built fortification with grim satisfaction.¹¹⁰ Their deaths were no great loss he later told Franklin, as the Mahrattas were "wholly useless, and were fit only to plunder and destroy unresisting peasants."¹¹¹ When the Rajah of Jaipur subsequently negotiated a

¹⁰⁸Hennessy 111.

¹⁰⁹Franklin, Military Memoirs 161.

¹¹⁰Franklin, Military Memoirs 170.

¹¹¹Franklin, Military Memoirs 174.

peace treaty with Thomas, many of the European officers of the Rajah's army, and the Rajputs themselves, enlisted to serve the Irish Rajah.¹¹²

Jahazi-Sahib victory against the Rajputs bolstered his army, and his confidence, but left him further isolated from those who surrounded him. Khushwant Singh in *Ranjit Singh (1780-1839)* wrote that there were three major powers in India at this moment: Thomas on the Punjab border, Daulat Rao Sindiah with his Mahratta chiefs, and the EITC beyond Delhi.¹¹³ Although Thomas continued to be a thorn in the side of Daulat Rao Sindiah, Sindiah was willing to leave Thomas alone as long as he was keeping the Sikhs at bay. Kurram Sing however, a chieftain amongst the Sikhs and ruler of the Shahbad district, was determined to crush Thomas once and for all.

In 1800 Kurram Sing called a council of many of the Sikh tribes, which agreed that Thomas was an incredibly dangerous person and decided to unify against him. They knew that should they fail to defeat them, they should expect the "most serious ill consequences to their tribe" from the ornery Irishman's wrath.¹¹⁴ Single-handedly, Thomas achieved what no one thought possible. He unified the Sikhs. Initially, the Sikhs did not take Thomas on head on, preferring to raid the surrounding independent chiefs as they were considered much easier prey. Thomas marched his army to the border, close to where the Sikhs were raiding. It was at this point that the Sikhs made a fatal error. They challenged Thomas, ordering Thomas to retreat from the border, and demanded a messenger from Thomas informing them of his withdrawal. To this, Thomas had but one reply: "If I had feared the power of the Sikhs I would not have

¹¹² Hennessy 117.

¹¹³ Singh Khushwant, *Ranjit Singh: Maharajah of the Punjab* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2001) 28.

¹¹⁴ Franklin, *Military Memoirs* 270.

penetrated thus far into the Punjab. I am accustomed to receive, and not send messengers.”¹¹⁵ Cleverly exploiting the animosity of the independent chiefs the Sikh army were raiding, Thomas allied with them, and after a seven month campaign Thomas defeated the Sikhs on the field of battle, forcing them to pay an exorbitant indemnity. Perhaps if Thomas had been a little less arrogant at this point he would have been suspicious about the speed with which the Sikhs agreed to his terms of peace. But instead, he returned home, while the Sikhs secretly reached out to Sindiah, offering an alliance to bring down the Irishman who had become a threat to both sides.¹¹⁶

This was the highpoint of Thomas’ power. “I ended a campaign of seven months,” Thomas told Francklin, “in which I had been more successful than I could possibly have expected.” He had lost about a third of his fighting force against the Sikhs, but “realized near two hundred thousand rupees, exclusive of the pay of my army, and was to receive an additional one hundred thousand for the hostages which were delivered up.” It had been a triumphal expedition, in which he boasted, “I explored the country, formed alliances, and, in short, was dictator” in all the countries belonging to the Sikhs, south of the river Sutlej.¹¹⁷ By January 1800, Thomas personally commanded one of the largest armies in India.¹¹⁸ He had at his disposal 8 battalions of infantry (6,000 men) 50 cannon, 1,000 European styled cavalry, 1,500 mounted native auxiliaries, and 2,000 militia.¹¹⁹ At his present strength, Thomas was convinced that he could

¹¹⁵Franklin, Military Memoirs 283.

¹¹⁶Hennessy 138.

¹¹⁷Franklin, Military Memoirs 292.

-He has no issue declaring himself dictator ... or being perturbed by the loss of 1/3 of his men again -- but he does make especial note when the men who died were some of “his best” .

¹¹⁸Franklin, Military Memoirs 298.

M.S. Naravane, Battles of the Honourable East India Company: Making of the Raj (New Delhi: A.P.H. Pub. Corp, 2006) 76.

¹¹⁹Franklin, Military Memoirs 298.

“hold out against the efforts of all the native princes of India.”¹²⁰ Perhaps he was right. Thomas was now, in every sense of the word, a proud dictator and the emperor of his own little empire on the edge of the Punjab.



Figure 8: Thomas' Journey

Source of Original Figure: www.dmaps.com/carte.php?num_car=280&lang=en, overlay made by Devon Miller

¹²⁰Franklin, *Military Memoirs* 303.

As the British expanded their direct control over India, the recently appointed Peshwa Bajirao, the figurative head of the Marathas, was trying to reestablish his authority over the various factions of his people.¹²¹ The head of one of the weakest of the Maratha factions, it was rumored that he was negotiating with the British to defeat Sindiah (head of one of the strongest factions) and reinstate him at the head of the Marathas.¹²² As of 1800, Wellesley's EITC Administration had worked with the various Maratha factions before, such as when they allied with Sindiah's Maratha faction against the kingdom of Mysore in 1799.¹²³ However, the British, happy with the disunified, easily malleable Maratha factions, feared a unified Maratha nation which they did not directly control. The British, who were now in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars, were worried Sindiah could unify the Marathas and side with Napoleon, due to the fact that most of his Generals were French.¹²⁴

In the face of this, Sindiah hesitated to ally with the Sikhs against Thomas, a powerful potential ally. Instead, Sindiah wrote to Thomas, offering him a position with the Marathas as a high-ranking commander, directly under General Perron, the principal military commander of the Maratha forces. However, Thomas refused to serve under Perron, a French officer, declaring that it was, "impossible they could ever act in concert, or with docility."¹²⁵ It's doubtful that patriotism was the primary reason Thomas refused to serve under Perron. After all, he had had no qualms serving under French command with Begum in 1787, and besides many of Perron's officers were British. Perhaps he remembered Levassoult and the French faction in Begum's

¹²¹Chaurasia 63.

¹²²Chakravorty 23.

¹²³M.S. Naravane, Battles of the Honourable East India Company: Making of the Raj (New Delhi: A.P.H. Pub. Corp, 2006) 172.

¹²⁴"Lord Wellesley's Administration" in The Calcutta Review, Volume 9, University of Calcutta Jan. - Jun. 1848: 75.

¹²⁵Franklin, Military Memoirs 299.

It is clear that Franklin wants to portray Thomas as a patriot. In reality, if Thomas even deployed this argument of national animosity, it was probably provide yet another reason why he wouldn't serve under Perron, rather than any real sentiments of Patriotism.

court, but more likely he was reluctant to accept any subordinate position by this point. Lewis F. Smith, a British officer serving under Perron, agreed with this assessment. Smith believed that Thomas refused Sindiah's initial offer due to the fact that Thomas "was uncommonly ambitious ... he would be all or nothing. To serve under the orders of another was an inglorious dependence [for the man]." ¹²⁶

Thomas was likely unwilling to sacrifice his newfound freedom, and he also was unwilling to place himself at the mercy of any terms the Mahratta government might impose. He was after all, the Dictator of the Punjab, why should he follow the orders of a Frenchman and the young Daulat Rao Sindiah? True to form, Thomas offered a compromise. He told Sindiah he was only willing to serve as the head of his own army, and only if Sindiah paid for his army while it was deployed. In essence, Thomas was willing to serve with Sindiah, but not under him.

In response, in 1801 Sindiah informed Thomas he was sending Perron to the Punjab to negotiate terms on his behalf. But in reality Perron was already on route to the Punjab, with a "diplomatic force" of 10 battalions of infantry (7,500 men), 8,000 horse, and 60 pieces of heavy artillery prepared to negotiate with the Sikh tribes who wanted an alliance against Thomas. When Thomas met with Perron, Perron demanded that Thomas surrender the district of Jypur (a province on the Punjab border) and become "an immediate servant" of Dowlut Row Sindiah. Insulted, Thomas stormed out of negotiations in "disgust."¹²⁷

Since Thomas refused to surrender the city of Jaipur, Perron prepared to take it by force. As Thomas gathered his forces, Perron sent word to Sindiah, who marched to reinforce Perron, joined by many of the Maratha chiefs who Thomas had slighted, raided, or directly attacked during his career in India. When Sindiah arrived, he was at the head of over a dozen Maratha and

¹²⁶Smith 383.

¹²⁷Franklin, Military Memoirs 308.

Sikh chiefs, including Begum Sumru, and approximately 30,000 men and horses, with 110 cannon.¹²⁸ Thomas' raids and ever-growing power had managed to unify the Maratha chiefs in the north under Daulat, just as he unified the Sikhs. As Sindiah's forces surrounded Thomas, and the Irishman retreated to Fort George Gyr (a fort in the borders of his provinces) his remaining allies deserted him.¹²⁹

Thomas was now abandoned by almost everyone, but his enemies were still wary of him, and for the time being kept him encircled in Fort George Gyr. After a few assaults were beaten back, Perron came up with a plan, rounding up local villagers, and informing Thomas that he held his men's families as hostage. Most of Thomas' remaining troops deserted to protect their families, and Thomas denounced Perron's tactic as "corrupt and treacherous," but there was little he could do to prevent it.¹³⁰ Rapidly running out of food and men, Thomas broke out of his encirclement and retreated to his capital at Hansi. Of the men who had been with him at George Gyr, only the "ever faithful Rajputs," and his European officers remained.¹³¹ When Sindiah's forces arrived at Hansi, 900 men of his garrison surrendered immediately, a stinging betrayal to Thomas, who retreated to the last fort within the city with 300 Rajputs and his remaining European officers. After repelling three separate assaults, with bullets and powder gone, Perron's officer's reported that Thomas continued to fight on the walls, armed with a sword and shield.¹³² But his world had collapsed, and realizing the hopelessness of his situation, Thomas finally surrendered in December 1800, on the condition that he and his men would be granted clemency and given the full honors of war.

¹²⁸ Edwardes 248.

¹²⁹ It is curious that Thomas named the fort after a British Monarch. A more likely explanation for the name is that Thomas named it after the Fort St. George in Madras, implying that Thomas saw himself, or wanted to be seen to be, building a new Empire. That, or he wanted to suggest to the British he saw himself as a subject to the crown, possibly to help him diplomatically.

¹³⁰ Franklin, *Military Memoirs* 317.

¹³¹ Franklin, *Military Memoirs* 328.

¹³² Fraser 224.

Thomas appeared cordial and resigned at his defeat, but his notorious temper bubbled up one last time at a farewell feast, held in Thomas' honor by the British mercenary officers in Perron's forces who respected the fight Thomas had put up, and were "indignant" in regards to what they viewed as the "underhanded" tactics used by Perron to secure his victory over Thomas.¹³³ When a drunken French officer toasted General Perron's military success at the dinner, Thomas's "European mask" cracked, and "in tears" he leapt over the table towards the French officer. While Thomas was restrained by Perron's British officers, the French officer fled out of the tent.¹³⁴ While being escorted to his assigned quarters, the Irishman left one last gift to Perron's forces: he cut the hand off a sentry before his escort could stop him, after the sentry failed to recognize who Thomas was. In the morning, when he was sober, Thomas, attempting to salvage his image, sent the poor sentinel five hundred rupees, and wrote the French officer a sincere apology. On the 3rd of January 1802, Thomas once again found himself at Anupshahr, where he remained until he settled his financial affairs.¹³⁵

Leaving his Indian wife to remain in India with her mother, Thomas now decided to return to Tipperary, and set out, with Captain William Francklin as his military escort, for Calcutta to board a ship to Ireland.¹³⁶ On the way, Thomas visited General Wellesley, who was now maneuvering to reinstate the Peshwa's authority, as a British surrogate in Maratha territory.¹³⁷ Embittered by his defeat, Thomas took the opportunity to ensure that the men and women responsible for his downfall paid a price. Left with no other means of securing revenge, he became an agent and informer for British Imperialism, providing Wellesley with a detailed

¹³³Fraser 224.

¹³⁴Fraser 224.

¹³⁵Hennessy 167.

¹³⁶It was very common, even expected, for Indian wives of Europeans to remain in India if the European returned home, regardless of the European's monetary situation at the point of his retirement.

See: Jasanoff 96.

¹³⁷The Edinburgh Review 372.

survey of Maratha politics and society.¹³⁸ Knowing that Wellesley's main concern was eliminating French influence in the region, Thomas went to great pains to emphasize the dominant nationality of Sindiah's generals. Shortly after this meeting, after two decades in India, the fallen "Rajah from Tipperary contracted a fever and passed away, and was buried in a military cemetery at Berhampur. But Thomas secured his revenge against the Marathas when Wellesley and the army of the EITC exploited his advice to defeat Sindiah's Maratha faction at the Battle of Delhi in 1803.¹³⁹

When and why did Thomas suddenly develop a strong sense of patriotism for the nation that had long occupied and oppressed his Irish homeland?¹⁴⁰ Thomas had avoided working for the British in India, serving Indian rulers and his own interests, a mercenary soldier fighting on the borders of a fractured Mughal empire that was gradually being superseded by an aggressive British empire. During these years he had successfully exploited local political tensions and rivalries to secure his own personal power and prestige as a military commander. Only when he lost everything did he claim it had always been his intention to serve the British empire. When Thomas accompanied William Francklin to Calcutta in 1802, and recounted the story of his Indian career to the British captain, Thomas shrewdly sought to portray himself as a loyal British soldier and subject of the empire to which he now wanted to return.

¹³⁸The Edinburgh Review 372.

¹³⁹The Calcutta Review 75. - In this, Wellesley uses Perron's "French Sympathies" as justification for his acceptance of the Peshwa's deal to march on Sindiah. Thomas and his memoir clearly alluded to the "French Threat". It is likely, given that Thomas and Wellesley met just a year before the battle of Delhi in 1803, that Wellesley received this information from Thomas during their meeting, using it as further justification for his involvement in foreign affairs.

Francklin, Military Memoirs 336.

¹⁴⁰Jasanoff 121.

Thomas N. Brown, "Nationalism and the Irish Peasant, 1800-1848," The Review of Politics Oct. 1953: 423.

It is doubtful that Thomas was ever really as patriotic as he represented himself to Francklin, but, Francklin was clearly enamored by the Irish mercenary, and saw Thomas as a larger-than-life hero and, by the time he died, as a friend, as evidenced by his reference to Thomas as “our friend and hero” in Thomas’ memoir.¹⁴¹ As a soldier he was impressed by Thomas’ military exploits, and as a budding orientalist scholar and man of science, Francklin was interested in Thomas’ vast “knowledge of the different tribes and nations that composed the interior of the vast peninsula of India.” “No man perhaps” wrote Francklin, “ever more thoroughly studied, or more properly appreciated, the Indian character at large.”¹⁴²

It was this knowledge, Thomas’ insider account of Indian politics and life that helps to explain why the story of a military upstart was sponsored by such powerful men in the British Indian administration. But one also cannot ignore the fact that Thomas’ memoir contained a fascinating story. As a much later, swashbuckling British imperialist, orientalist and adventurer, T.E. Lawrence would say in his collected works: “men were always fond to believe a romantic tale.”¹⁴³ Francklin certainly provided this in his memoir of Thomas, a tale of military adventure amidst the ruins of the Mughal past. His memoir of Thomas also expressed new concepts of merit and talent that had emerged after the American Revolution and the French Revolution. The story of a heroic British soldier who was able to “rise above the lowliness of [his] situation, “to become a general, without a formal education or aristocratic connections and lineage, was a powerful one.”¹⁴⁴ Not coincidentally, it also fit well with emerging ideas about British racial superiority that would be used to justify the conquest of a new empire in India.

¹⁴¹Francklin, Military Memoirs 295.

¹⁴²Francklin, Military Memoirs 337.

¹⁴³T. E. Lawrence, The Collected Works of Lawrence of Arabia (Unabridged): Seven Pillars of Wisdom + The Mint + The Evolution of a Revolt + Complete Letters (Including Translations of The Odyssey and The Forest Giant) (e-artnow, 2015) 450.

¹⁴⁴Francklin, Military Memoirs 15.

Thomas clearly saw the new frontier of the British Empire as a land of unique opportunity for men like himself. After his defeat, he expressed this idea to Wellesley: "I shall be sorry to see my conquests fall to the Mahrattas, I wish to give them to my king and to serve him the remainder of my days; and this I can only do as a soldier in this part of the world."¹⁴⁵ But back in England, many members of the British ruling class feared exactly this kind of mobility, and the emergence of another Clive -- a British upstart with no moral compass and no patriotic intent who raided India to line his pockets. Francklin's account attempted to allay these fears by developing the concept of the "self-made man" in his memoir of Thomas. Like Robert Clive, Julius Caesar, and Napoléon Bonaparte, Thomas conquered vast swathes of territory. But, instead of using the wealth and power accumulated through these conquests to challenge the establishment of his home country, Francklin portrayed Thomas as a patriot and hero, who was determined to serve his country and maintain the status quo. Indeed, Francklin was keen throughout the memoir to emphasize the differences between Thomas and Robert Clive, and to repudiate any notion that he was motivated by the pursuit of personal wealth and power.

The patronage and popularity that Thomas' memoirs received was also due to the fact that it justified the increasingly militaristic and authoritarian policy of the British in India. Hostility to the EITC, and the fear that the wealth of British India was corrupting British Government and undermining "public sentiment and public virtue" in England, had led Parliament to pass Pitt's India Act in 1793.¹⁴⁶ This placed the EITC under close government and parliamentary supervision, creating a board of control to monitor the EITC's administrative and political activity, and ordering the EITC to pursue a policy of non-intervention in Indian political

¹⁴⁵Francklin, *Military Memoirs* 341.

¹⁴⁶Great Britain Parliament 508-510

affairs.¹⁴⁷ But by 1803, faced with aggressive British expansion and the recent annexation of Mahrattas territory and the Kingdom of Mysore, the British were faced with a defining moment in the history of British India.¹⁴⁸ While most of the British public and the government were uneasy about the increasingly militaristic and interventionist policy of General Wellesley, they also recognized that it was vital to defeat French influence in India.¹⁴⁹ Thomas' depiction (true or not) of Perron, Sindiah's chief general, as a French nationalist in his memoir was just the justification Wellesley needed to justify his subjugation of the Maratha territories and the capture of the Mughal Emperor.¹⁵⁰ The argument provided in Thomas' memoir was the very reasoning used to justify Wellesley's acceptance of the Peshwa's deal: In exchange for protection from Sindiah and Holkar (another prominent Maratha family), the Peshwa agreed 6,000 native troops to Wellesley and his assurance of Maratha collaboration with the English.¹⁵¹

Francklin's account of Thomas' life addressed this uneasiness about the creation of a new Asian empire. One of the key understandings of this time for the English was that the Orient, with its grand architecture and complex governmental systems, had regressed from civilization to a state of despotic savagery.¹⁵² In 1805, many British academics still followed the first official Historiographer of the East India Company Robert Orme's theory that the climate of India was responsible for the attitudes and dispositions of the people who lived there.¹⁵³ Therefore, there was legitimate concern about the corrupting influence of empire, and the danger

¹⁴⁷Lloyd 105.

¹⁴⁸The Calcutta Review, Volume 9: 74.

¹⁴⁹Jasanoff 165.

¹⁵⁰The Calcutta Review, Volume 9: 75

¹⁵¹The Calcutta Review 75.

¹⁵²Said 171.

¹⁵³Following the teachings of French classical enlightenment writer Montesquieu in *Vesprit des Loix* [1748] and English historian and first official Historiographer of the East India Company Robert Orme in *Effeminacy of the Inhabitants of Indostan* [1782]. This line of reasoning is seen in Thomas' memoir, where Thomas blames the climate for the difference between the character of the Rajputs of Oudipoor and the rest of their brethren. Sinharaja Tammita Delgoda, "'Nabob, Historian and Orientalist.' Robert Orme: The Life and Career of an East India Company Servant (1728-1801)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* Nov. 1992: 363–376. Francklin, *Military Memoirs* 207.

of the British Administrators of India degrading into a similar state of “savagery” as the natives due to being in the same climate, and being surrounded by the natives.¹⁵⁴ In response to this fear, following William Pitt’s reforms in 1793, the administrators of the EITC began to see themselves as responsible for limiting indigenous violence, which meant that they also had to deal with the issue of British violence toward native Indians. While this was achieved by the passing of the Bombay General Orders of 6 October 1814, which threatened the dismissal of any officer “who shall be proved to have been guilty of cruelty to any Native, either by violently and illegally beating, or otherwise maltreating him.” as this behavior was seen to be a breach of the articles of war, Thomas’ memoir provided evidence of the necessity of this measure.¹⁵⁵ Francklin portrays Thomas as an agent of civilization and order in a land of savagery and disorder who struggles against the corrupting influences of the world around him.¹⁵⁶ This can be seen by Francklin justification of Thomas’ establishment of a dictatorship not as an expression of personal character but as a natural and logical response to the “savage tendencies of the people” that surrounded him in India.¹⁵⁷ At moments in the narrative where the “civilized” character of Thomas breaks down, Francklin makes sure to blame the circumstances and the people around him. Thomas in other words was forced by ‘savages’ to be more dictatorial and brutal, the classic

¹⁵⁴ This concern is clearly demonstrated in the debates in parliament seen in [Great Britain Parliament 482, 508-510.]

- This fear would continue to grow, being powerfully expressed a hundred years later in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. While the exact details of the novel differ from Thomas’s story, the key theme of a European descending into savagery is explored. Like the central protagonist of *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz, Thomas established a dictatorship in a native land. But unlike Kurtz he did not descend into savagery, and in the end was able to rejoin the ranks of civilized society. The fear of becoming fully savage is evident by Francklin’s need to justify and excuse Thomas’ temper as being the product of adopting “the savage tendencies of the people he surrounded himself with.” Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2008)

Francklin, *Military Memoirs* 399.

¹⁵⁵ Jordanna Bailkin, “The Boot and the Spleen: When Was Murder Possible in British India?,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Apr. 2006: 463.

¹⁵⁶ The issue of the brutality of the European civilizing mission in regions like Africa and India continued to be an issue during the remainder of the 19th Century. - Sven Lindqvist, and Joan Tate, *Exterminate All the Brutes!: A Modern Odyssey into the Heart of Darkness into the Heart of Dark* (New York: The New Press, 1996)

¹⁵⁷ Francklin, *Military Memoirs* 399.

excuse for imperial brutality and violence. Whatever savagery Thomas exhibited therefore was not an indication of his essential Britishness, and his commitment to a civilized social order, but a function of his Indian environment and of the native people that inhabited it.

This was also the justification for Wellesley's policies of military conquest, and to a broader extent the British policy of imperial control in India after 1803. British power in India was not the result of a predetermined tendency for military violence and political tyranny, but was forced upon British forces out of necessity. In this way, Thomas' memoir addressed and explained Wellesley's interventionist and expansionist policy by establishing that the Marathas, and the chiefs who governed under them, formed a despotic, decaying, corrupt, luxury-steeped empire that needed to be shown, forcefully if necessary, the proper way to govern. An example of this is the Rajputs in Thomas' memoir who longed to be "rescued" from the despotism of the Rajah of Jaipur. This force was further excused, as Sir Charles Wood declared in Parliament almost 60 years later, because Britain had "ever given her best in the cause of liberty and civilization." Later, this would evolve, using the arguments in Thomas' memoir into Lord Lugard's declaration that "it is our right and duty to rule...these countries because it is the genius of our race to colonize."¹⁵⁸ Thomas' story provided the groundwork and justification for this train of argument by portraying the Marathas and local chiefs in India as savage and corrupt rulers, a justification that was quickly extended towards other nations and peoples.

Not only did Thomas' story justify the expanding empire, it also helped enable it. Historian Nicholas Dirks asserts that "colonial knowledge both enabled conquest and was produced by it."¹⁵⁹ Thomas's careful survey of cities and people in the Indian subcontinent was a

¹⁵⁸Frederick John Dealtry Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1922) 618.

Arthur B. Keith, Speeches & Documents on Indian Policy: 1750-1921 (Delhi: Anmol Publ, 1985) 4.

¹⁵⁹Bernard S. Cohn, Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge (Princeton Univ. Press, 1996) ix.

prime example of this, and it also helped the EITC realize its expansionist objectives. Thomas (with some aid from the budding orientalist scholar, Francklin) seems to have taken detailed notes about the demographic, cultural, militaristic and political layout of the region of India in which he operated. His account provided some semblance of order to what was otherwise a rather chaotic and confusing collection of Indian states. The EITC and later, the British Raj, were keen to collect information about the lands they were administering. As Warren Hastings, governor-general of Bengal from 1772 to 1785 argued, successful administration of India required "Every accumulation of knowledge," especially that "obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise a dominion founded on the right of conquest" was "useful to the state."¹⁶⁰ This knowledge included things such as local customs, traditions, diet and the like, all of which was found in Thomas' memoir regarding the territories surrounding Delhi and the Punjab.¹⁶¹ These notes helped lay the groundwork for British success in India, and provided knowledge that expedited the expansion of the British Empire. His memoir functioned as a "how to guide" to conquer this region of India, a sort of geopolitical survey, mixed with a romantic adventure story, that blended the personal and the political in ways that were highly beneficial to the EITC and to the expansion of British administration in India in a format which was easily accessible to the reader and the wider public.

¹⁶⁰ Warren Hastings and Edmund Burke, Articles of Charge of High Crimes and Misdemeanors, Against Warren Hastings, Esq., Late Governor General of Bengal: Presented to the House of Commons, in the Months of April and May 1786 (London: J. Debrett, 1786) 13.

The British Administration was so invested in this concept that they would establish a college in Fort William, Calcutta in 1800, in commemoration of their victory over the Tipu Sultan the previous year, in order to educate the new generation of administrators about the lands they would rule. They would later establish another school in Hailey, Hertfordshire in 1806. Thomas' memoir would be cited in one of the standard textbooks given to the students of these institutions.

Kapil Raj, "Colonial Encounters and the Forging of New Knowledge and National Identities: Great Britain and India, 1760-1850," *Osiris* 2000: 119-134.

James Mill, The History of British India (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1820) 245.

¹⁶¹ Francklin Military Memoirs 107-112, 142-151, 349-388.

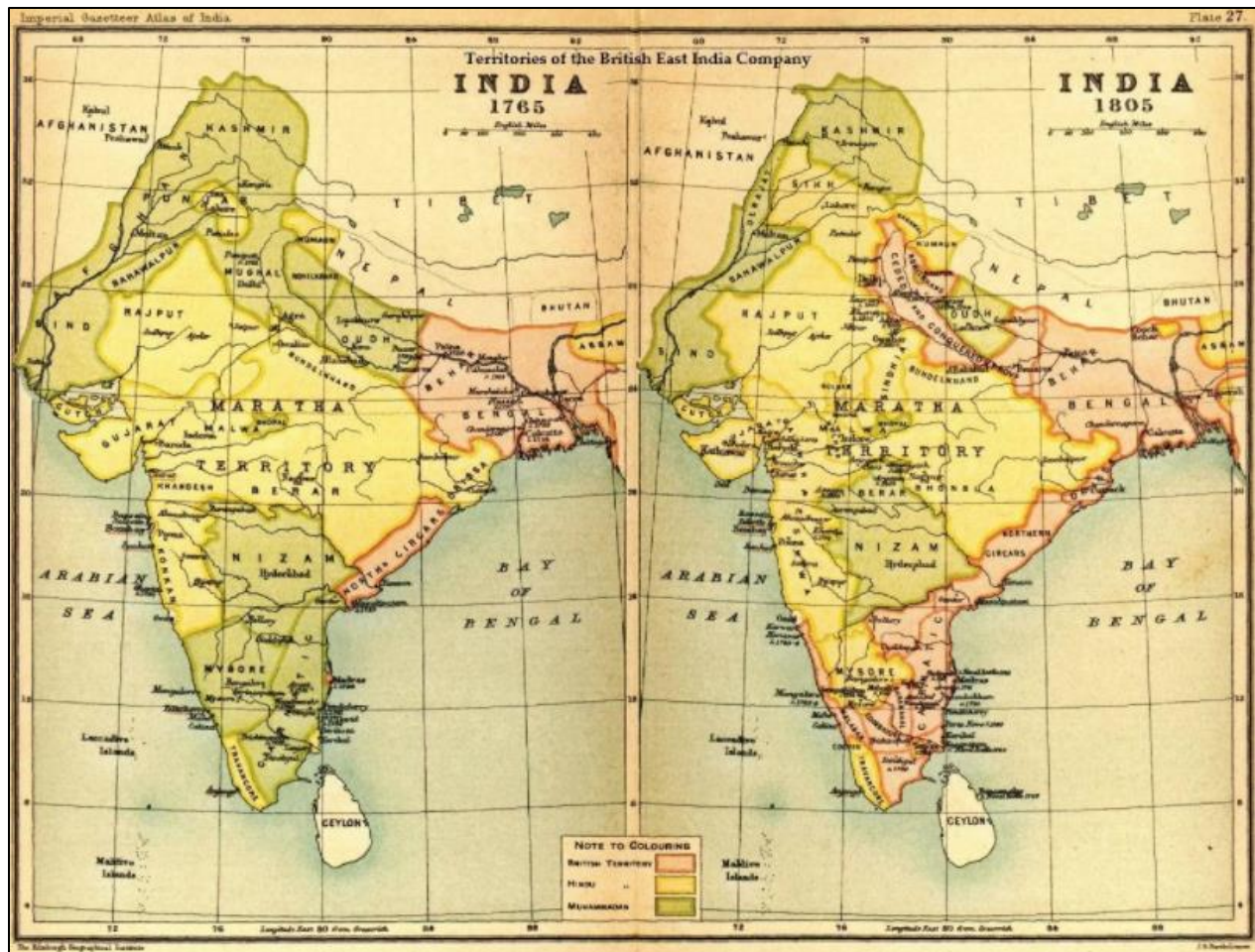


Figure 1:1 Territories of the British East India Company - This map demonstrates the expansion of British control in India [in pink], from 1765 [Left] to 1805 [Right]
<http://dighist.fas.harvard.edu/courses/2015/HUM54/exhibits/show/mappingmumbai/eastindiacompany>
 Image of map of India under the British East India Company from *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Oxford University Press, 1907. Image: WikiCommons

It is clear that Thomas' memoir played an important role in shaping and justifying British Imperial policy at the time. It was cited in James Mill's *The History of British India* to discuss "the civilization of the Hindus," and in particular their "military rudeness."¹⁶² Mill was one of the most prominent Victorian intellectuals of his time, and his work on India, first published in 1817, became a required textbook for a generation of British administrators in India, and had a

¹⁶²Mill 245.

considerable influence on British Imperial policy.¹⁶³ In 1833, Lord Thomas B. Macaulay, a prominent English historian and politician, referred to Mill's work as "on the whole the greatest historical work which has appeared in our language since that of Gibbon."¹⁶⁴ In the 1870's, Thomas' discussion of Sikh military prowess and his account of the Punjab, was still being used to explore nineteenth century British imperial policy in India as part of an essay on India in the *Edinburgh Review*.¹⁶⁵ By this time, the Sikhs had been integrated into the British Army, and the British government was on the verge of annexing the Punjab and its inhabitants.¹⁶⁶

With these differing portrayals of Thomas' life, one must wonder if historians have really been fair Thomas' true character. For this, one must ask if Thomas was a national hero, an adventurer driven to emulate stories of his youth, or a ruthless bandit out to line his own pockets? In reality it was likely that he was a combination of all of them.

In many ways he was a transitional figure in British India, connecting the private power of a Robert Clive to the military and administrative power of Arthur Wellesley. Thomas was posthumously made a British hero by his memoirist, William Francklin, but in life he was always a reluctant agent of British imperialism at best, driven into the hands of the British Empire by ambition, spite, and opportunism, exposing patriotic sentiments out of sheer pragmatism to insure his desires were met, a far cry from the altruistic motivations Francklin portrays him with. He did not arrive in India with predetermined orientalist outlooks, a deep sense of patriotism, or with a predetermined plan to conquer an exotic "oriental" world, although his account of his experiences was used to shape the views of British orientalists and imperialists long after his death and led to exactly this. He was in many respects Edwardes' opportunist and a mercenary

¹⁶³Mill xi.

¹⁶⁴Mill viii.

¹⁶⁵The *Edinburgh Review* 372.

¹⁶⁶Lloyd 152.

when circumstances demanded it, although, he did cling to what he saw as British concepts of military loyalty, honor, and generosity, which became key features of his personality and is identity in India which both Francklin and Hennessey identified. But, contrary to Hennessey and Francklin, it would appear that he did not arrive in India with all of these traits. Rather, he developed these traits as part of an exaggerated European identity he developed in response to his experiences in India.

At the end of the day, Thomas was a complicated man, who managed to contribute to, and shape, the empire he had tried, in the beginning of his life, to escape. One cannot decide how history will treat you, and, in Thomas' case, History has made him more than he was, but that doesn't diminish the significance of his historical impact. As a proud and fierce Irish adventurer, the fact that he is remembered at all is perhaps all he would have wanted.

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